IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

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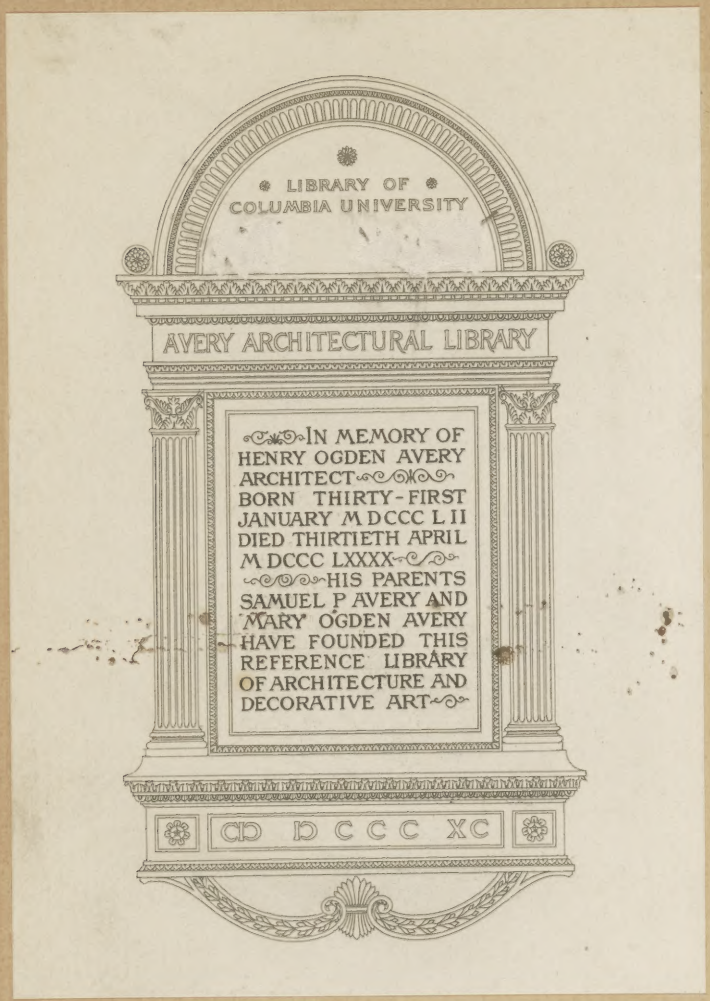
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THE WORD IN THE PATTERN

Wm. H. Ward & Co. Ld. Sc.

The Chapel in the village graveyard,
Compton, Surrey.

THE WORD IN THE PATTERN

A KEY TO THE SYMBOLS ON THE WALLS OF THE CHAPEL AT COMPTON

BY

MRS. GEORGE FREDERICK WATTS

* * *

With Illustrations from Pen Drawings by LOUIS R. DEUCHARS and MARY S. WATTS

The Photogravures from Negatives by GEORGE ANDREWS

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To EGLANTINE JEBB,

who by the gift of sympathy first called about her a little gathering of workers from her village to practise the beautiful art of Wood Carving, and from which beginning sprang the union of many workers forming the Association of the Home Arts and Industries, these few pages, endeavouring to explain the spirit in the work done by us at Compton for our Chapel, are dedicated with love and gratitude.

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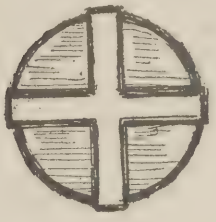
ERRATUM.—For "necleus," on page 12 (ninth line from bottom), read "nucleus."

THE WORD IN THE PATTERN.

BUILT to the loving memory of all who find rest near its walls, and for the comfort and help of those to whom the sorrow of separation yet remains; the chapel for the new grave-yard in Compton has on its walls the story, or at least some fragments of the story, of the spiritual life, on the wing of which, in the passage between the mystery of birth and the mystery of death, material life is lifted to the glorious consciousness of its affinity with the Infinite.

In trying to revive in some degree that living quality which was in all decoration when patterns had meaning, the character of our own Celtic art—Ancient British, Irish, and Scotch as it is,—has been followed, and many of the symbols are taken from carved stones and crosses, or from those rare and exquisite illuminations on vellum, now the treasures of National Museums and Libraries, but once the most sacred possessions of the Celts, who, with devoted labour, loved thus to make beautiful their manuscript books of the Gospels. Some of the symbols,

however, are immeasurably older than any Celtic art, and have travelled here, and all over Europe, like the root-words of languages, from their birth-place in the East, and the general plan of the chapel is one of these symbols.



The Circle of Eternity, with the Cross of Faith running through it, is from pre-historic times. The earliest Christians found this sign sacred among men struggling to find, like the men of Ephesus, the "Unknown God," and they gave to it the consecration of the fuller revelation of the Christian faith. If the cross had been used in past ages as a symbol of power over the four quarters of the earth, it was more to them; it was the power of redeeming Love, with arms outstretched to all the world. If it meant to others the path of the swift sun in his course,[1] shining over the four quarters,—that path of glory that led men to cry in the oldest language of the world to the "Light Father"—it was more to them, it was the sign of the Divine speaking to the human, saying "I am the Light of the World, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have

1 "Swift is the sun in his course; for he compasseth the heavens round about, and fetcheth his course again to his own place in one day."—I. ESDRAS iv. 34.

"Infinite in the East, Infinite in the South, Infinite in the West, Infinite in the North, above, below, everywhere, Infinite. Thus it is said, He who is in the fire, he who is in the heart, he who is in the sun, they are one and the same."—SANSKRIT HYMN. *Prof. Max Muller's Translation.*

The Doorway.

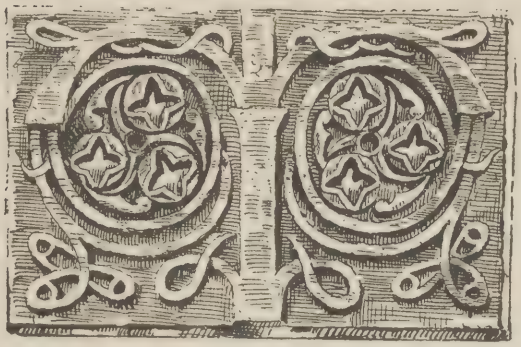
the Light of Life," and the circle running round this sign of love and light and life, complete it with the sign of eternity; being as it were the promise of these perfected and immortal. So do these signs, simple enough in themselves, come to us through the ages, bearing with them, not only their deep spiritual meaning and suggestions, but being also witnesses of the eternity of religious aspiration; the inarticulate cry of the spirit of the human, seeking then and now and always a return to its own essence in the Divine Father.

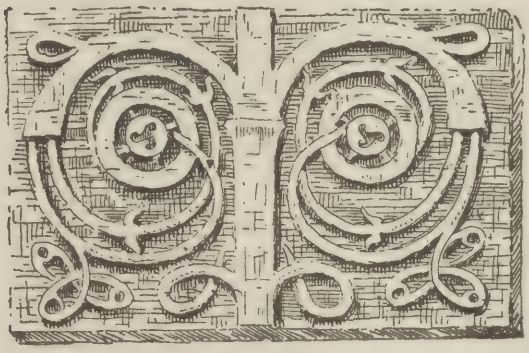
As far as is possible therefore every bit of the decoration of this chapel, modelled in clay of Surrey, by Compton hands, under unusual conditions—much of the work having been done gratuitously, and all of it with the love that made the work delightful—has something to say though the patterns can claim to be no more than are the letters of a great word; hieroglyphs, and very inadequate as representations of the possible reach of the underlying thought suggested by them.

On the decorated bricks which run up all the buttresses is the "Tree of Life," that mystic tree of St. John's vision, which "bare twelve manner of fruits," all creation being symbolised as the "fruits"; a climbing creation, rising from flower to fruit, from shell to fish, serpent, beast, bird; sun, moon, stars, and angels. In very varied forms, down to the Middle Ages, the Tree of Life was a common pattern carved, painted or

embroidered upon things used for sacred purposes in Cathedrals and Churches.

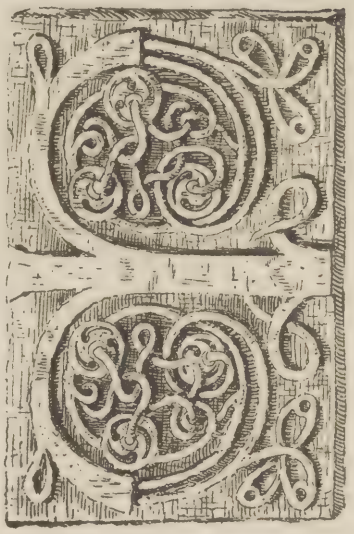
Of the antiquity of its origin this at least is known, that in a language that has ceased to be spoken, between three and four thousand years ago an Accadian Hymn exists, which describes the Tree of Life as planted, "in a holy place," and, "unto the heart of its holy house, which spread its shade like a forest, there was none who within entered not." (Prof. Sayce's Translation.) It was a natural and beautiful parable of life in all creation, a noble tree spreading its branches to the light of Heaven, yet fed and upheld by roots working in the darkness of the earth, converting all it meets with, even death and decay, into a rising stream of life, sent up again into the top-most bough; a shelter and a shade, blest to all creatures, delightful to the eye that can see the beauty of these

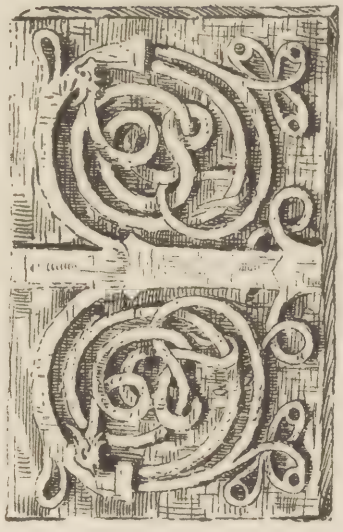


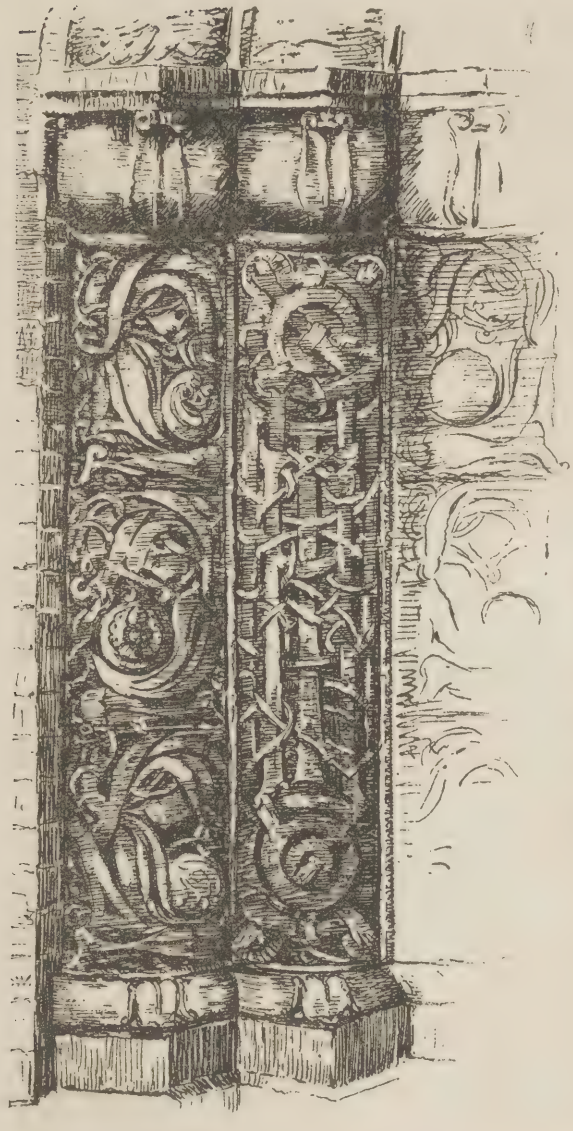


"fair companions of the landscape."

The forms on the small columns of the buttresses are symbolic of running water, and are intended to recall the words, "And he showed me a pure river of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." On the four capitals are the four symbols described as the four sides of the throne, "The first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had the face of a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle," which afterwards







came to be used as the distinctive symbols of the four Evangelists.

The lower buttress has upon its roof, the scalloped pattern in common use now, but in very early times (possibly by its inventors) it was only used when the ornament was meant to express the feeling of peace, and was probably suggested by the breast feathers of the mother bird, a simile since made so beautiful and pathetic by the words, "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth

gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not."

Turning from the buttress that flanks the west transept the decoration of the doorway is in face of us. The pillars rising from bases, upon which there is a suggestion of a half crushed evil with closed eyes, bear the great name "I AM." Interwoven with the initial letter "I" is the hand in the nimbus or glory, the Celtic symbol of God the Creator. The "I AM" stands guarding the man on his knees—the symbol on the outer pillars—reverently interpreting parables from the book of nature, that tell him of life after death. With the interlacing cord of Celtic art—which, whatever meaning may have been attached to it in those early times, is here used as the symbol of the unity of a divine life and law, running through all things—is inwoven the name of Christ, the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek Alphabet. They would say here, "I have girded thee though thou hast not known me." The parables from nature are these :—

1. The young blade springing from the dry seed, seemingly, dead and buried. "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened unless it die."

2. The butterfly rising with shining wings from its little tomb, the chrysalis.

3. The flower in full faith casting off its petals that the seed may ripen, and once more renew life.

4. The human heart, owning to itself its spiritual birthright.

5. The flower that closes with the setting sun, and opens again when darkness is past.

6. The stars in their courses, that most splendid page in all the Book of Nature. "Oh God," said Kepler, when he discovered the laws of planetary motion, "I think again Thy thoughts after Thee."

Amongst the endless thoughts that lie behind this little star-like sign, none is more striking than the suggestion made in a recent theory in astronomy,[1] that, by the law of gravitation, the first necleus of a new star lies in the shattered fragments of other stars, believed by many to compose the cosmic dust which modern observation is showing to exist throughout space. If this be so, then the parable of life and death and re-birth is written in the great firmament of heaven.

7. On the right side of the doorway where these symbols are otherwise repeated, there is a parable from our own earth, Light,

[1] Sir Norman Lockyer's theory, known as "The Meteoritic Hypothesis."

The garment of Praise.

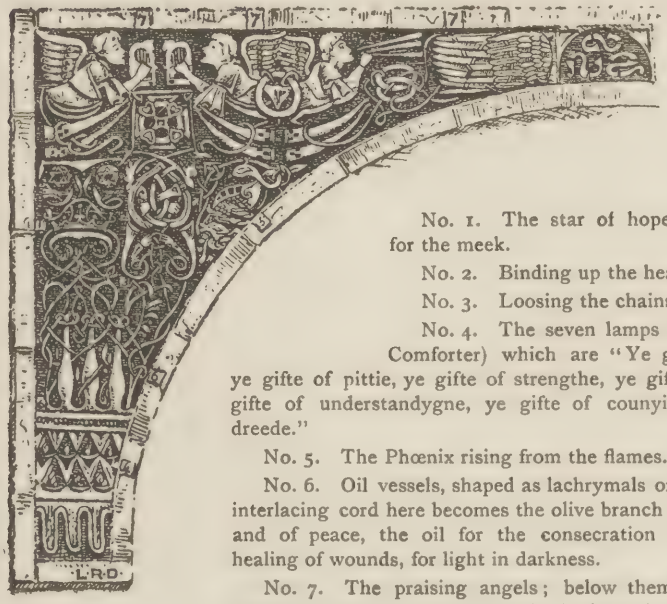
Twilight, and Night. In loneliness the human heart still asks, Watchman, what of the night?" and the answering cry is still "The morning cometh." In the shadow on the globe lies another comforting simile, in as much as there is night only over one-third part of the earth, while two-thirds are always in the light.

From the supporting columns the archway rises with its choir of angels; angels looking downward in sympathy or upward in hope. In their feathers is the peacock's eye, the old symbol of watchfulness, and interlaced with them the cord of unity, ending with a beautiful knot often found upon Celtic crosses, where the cord traces four hearts interlaced, so as to give at the same time the sign of the cross, sacrificing love; love not for one, but for all, even to the four quarters of the earth—Divine love, sacrificing, suffering, dying, to give spiritual life.

The wall veil (to borrow Mr. Ruskin's beautiful term) above the archway (Plate II.) is intended to represent an

embroidered hanging, and is called the "Garment of Praise," into which is woven symbols suggesting these words :—

1. Good tidings unto the meek.
2. To bind up the broken hearted.
3. To proclaim liberty to the captives.
4. To comfort all that mourn.
5. To give unto them beauty for ashes.
6. The oil of joy for mourning.
7. The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.



No. 1. The star of hope, and the crown for the meek.

No. 2. Binding up the heart.

No. 3. Loosing the chains.

No. 4. The seven lamps of the Spirit (the Comforter) which are "Ye gifte of wisdome, ye gifte of pittie, ye gifte of strengthe, ye gifte of comfait, ye gifte of understandygne, ye gifte of counyinge, ye gifte of dreede."

No. 5. The Phœnix rising from the flames.

No. 6. Oil vessels, shaped as lachrymals or tear bottles; the interlacing cord here becomes the olive branch in sign of victory and of peace, the oil for the consecration of mourning, for healing of wounds, for light in darkness.

No. 7. The praising angels; below them trumpets which bear the symbol of day and night ("the red day and the black day"—Rig Veda), very often found on the Celtic crosses, and carried down to this day, over the doors of wayside inns, where, in the name of "The Chequers," this sign of the hospitality of the old hostel still lingers.

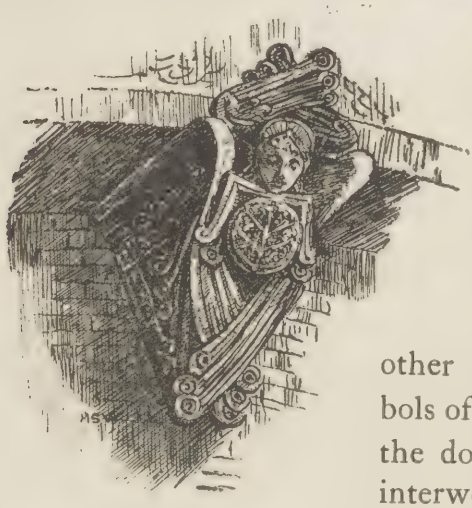
8. A Celtic monogram for the Sanctus or Holy, Holy, Holy! with the wings of the Spirit on either side.

The shafts of the columns which support the walls round the window spaces stand upon bases engraved with a symbol taken from a Celtic cross at Carew in Wales. This symbol was used by British Christians to signify the labyrinth or maze of life, round which was sometimes written the words, "God leadeth." This particular form of maze is exceedingly interesting, as it is obviously made of two very ancient sacred symbols, T of which the "Tau" cross is called the anticipatory cross, the legend being that this was the sign painted on the door-posts by the Children of Israel when the destroying angel passed over, but which, undoubtedly, had been used for thousands of years before Moses by the Egyptians, as their sign of immortality, and called by them the Key of Life.

From still further east, though found in every part of the world, comes the other part of the maze, the central cross its Sanskrit name having in it the root words "to be" and "well," a sign of beneficence, again over the four quarters, possibly the path of the sun, in Browning's words, "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world." The maze of life may bewilder, but the path of light runs through it: "It is well" is the name of the path, and the key to life eternal is in the strange labyrinth for those whom "God leadeth."

"Let nothing disturb thee,
Nothing affright thee.
All things are passing,
God never changeth;
Patient endurance
Attaineth to all things,
Who God possesseth
In nothing is wanting;
Alone God sufficeth."

The capitals crowning the columns have on them the symbols—of the Father, the hand lifted to make the sign of blessing; of the Son, the cross and circle with the initials, I. C. and X. C., being the first and last letter of the name Jesus Christ in Greek, all the sacred monograms of the name of Christ being of Greek origin; and the emblem of the Holy Spirit, the Dove, surrounded by the aureole. The words, Holy, Holy, Holy, are written below these on the north and south capitals; and on the east and west under other three well-known symbols of the Trinity, the triangle, the double triangle, and three interwound circles, are the words, "Now through a glass darkly."



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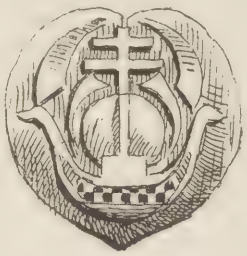
Frieze The Spirit of Hope.

The frieze which runs round the building, rests on three corbels, on these are the symbols of the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

THE WAY.
The Labyrinth or Maze.



THE TRUTH.
The Boat of the Sun with its symbol of day and night, the chequers upon its side; the sails, breath of life; the mast, the double-armed cross.

THE LIFE.
The Vine, the Christian's life in Christ, with its suggestion of a Tree of Life: "I am the Vine, ye are the Branches."

The frieze, which is called "The path of the Just," is, as far as the limitations of the material and the language of symbols allow, descriptive of the passage, "The path of the Just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." The idea of the path is suggested by a tree-like pattern dividing the panels, in whose roots mice and small creeping things lodge, while on the branches there are doves of peace, and storks, the symbol of the home. The trees have been used here to recall the passage, "That they might be called trees of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord."

The four sections have each a central pervading spirit, Hope, Truth, Love, and Light, while four attendant spirits present the symbols of those qualities and virtues which naturally and rightly follow these.

On the south-east section, the spirit of Hope rules (Plate 11). The bird of Hope, the peacock, the hope of immortality, chosen because the poetic teachers who fixed our symbols, saw that those wonderful blue eyes surrounded by rays shining with the colour of light, were cast every year and renewed again, and yet again; possibly too, because they saw the blind blue eye looked ever upwards to the heavens while it was trailed along the earth.

The anchor of Hope is over the four quarters of the earth, its shank is the cross of Faith, for Hope and Faith cannot be dissevered, the Latin cross in this symbol, dates from a very early time, and the double arm is said to represent the scroll of Pilate.

The star was given to Hope, no doubt, because of the evening star that shines out when the sun has gone down, and that is again the morning star that heralds dawn.

The lion is for the courage of Hope. "Be ye of good courage all ye that hope in the Lord."

The spider for the patience of Hope. "It is good that a man should both hope and wait."

The dove the comfort of Hope, the Spirit that "will not leave us comfortless."

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Image. The Spirit of Truth.

The hart, the aspiration or aim of Hope, "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks so panteth my soul after Thee, oh God." "Why art thou cast down, oh my soul, why art thou disquieted within me. Hope thou in God."

The next step on the path is led by the Spirit of Truth, with the bird of wisdom, whose eye can see through darkness (Plate III.).

Over the starry universe is the key of truth, and in the key-bit is wrought the labyrinth where "God leadeth," and the path of light with its key of eternal life. The sceptre given to Truth is to this day used as the sign of sovereignty, in its origin probably a figure of the thunderbolt, the shaft being intended for the streak of lightning, while the ball represented the sun and the cross the four winds of heaven, a summing-up of supreme supernatural power to the mind of primitive man.

The servants of Truth are Liberty, Justice, Unity, and Law. The Law of the Universe, for which the old Scandinavian symbol of the boat, of the sun, and the moon has been chosen; the Unity of the Universe, the shell, of which Wordsworth says :—

"Far murmurings within were heard,
Mysterious union with its native sea.
Even such a shell the universe itself
Is to the ear of Faith: and there are times,
I doubt not, when to you it doth impart

Authentic tidings of invisible things ;
Of ebb and flow, and ever during power,
And central peace subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation. Here you stand
Adore and worship when you know it not,
Pious beyond the intention of your thought,
Devout above the meaning of your will."

Justice follows with its balances ; nothing false, nothing disproportionate, must take the path with the Spirit of Truth ; and then the " Perfect Law of Liberty" comes in, a liberty of order, a perfect and just use of powers, in the least as in the greatest.

The flying fish, free in both air and sea, has been chosen as the type of Liberty.

From Truth the path leads on to Love, and on the north-west wall is the section where the spirit of Love reigns (Plate IV.).

The central symbol, taken from a Celtic missal, enfolds a cross in the interlacing of its heart-shaped and circle-shaped curves ; surely a fit cognizance to be borne by every traveller on the path that leads to perfect day. Of such a traveller an ancient hymn says :—

" This, too, is the goodness that he hath ;
He lets his mind pervade one quarter of the world
with thoughts of love,
And so the second,
And so the third,

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Frieze. The Spirit of Love.

And so the fourth,
And thus the whole wide world, above, below,
around, and everywhere,
Doth he continue to pervade with heart of love,
Far reaching, grown great, and beyond measure."

The bird of Love is the pelican of the legend, who draws blood from her own breast to feed her brood; a not uncommon representation of succouring, self-sacrificing love, and even of the King of Love Himself, in the religious architecture of the Middle Ages. On Love waits Purity, the symbol of the lily in the heart, "The white flower of a blameless life." "As he thinketh in his heart so is he."

Peace:—The dove, carrying the branch of olive, which symbol, when it is remembered how often trees and flowers are sown by birds who carry the seed, is beautifully amplified by the text: "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

For Joy: The happy bells that "ring out the false" and "ring in the true."

For Service, the service of God and the service of man. The wheel has been used here as a symbol of service—the wheel in its simplest form for the service of man, no aid of his own fashioning being more constantly in his service; and the winged wheel, with rays of light like whirling flames, for the symbol of the service of God—mystic, spiritual, eternal in its revolutions, from

age to age, since light was first separated from darkness. In Ezekiel's visionary poetic words, "As a wheel within a wheel," may lie intimations of the stupendous circle of universal law, in which our earth revolves with suns and stars, in the service of the Creator.

Finally the path ends in Light, the circle of a great light surrounded by other circles of suns and stars. (Plate V.). The eagle who can look at the sun is the bird of Light; sometimes used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and also as the symbol of St. John, who has declared the message to us, "That God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

In early Christian symbolism the crescent moon was the symbol of Heaven. It has been used here, with the word "God-like," to symbolise the heavenly temper. "Heaven is a temper" wrote an English Divine two centuries ago. The flames of the five lamps of the watchful virgins are rising "God-ward," and the word "God-lit," is suggested by the passage in Ephesians now in the revised version translated "Having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of your calling," the divine eye of insight in the heart of man; and for the flame of inspiration, the pentecostal shower, twelve flames descending upon the heads of those chosen messengers who were to carry the torch of the Gospel of Love. The flame of fire struck out, as if by miracle, from the dry wood, had for long

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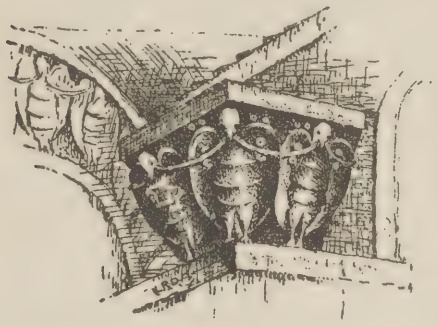
Image. The Spirit of Light.

ages seemed a heaven-born gift, and rising upward towards Heaven, as if drawn irresistibly thither and returning to its own, it became a beautiful and mystic symbol of the undying flame of life in the souls of the Sons of God. In token of this it was a primitive usage of the Church to put a lighted taper into the hand of the newly baptized.



The donor of the chapel has given to the bell these words :— "Be my voice neither feared nor forgotten." Around the belfry, on the north and south sides, runs a frieze of doves holding the olive branch, signs of the presence of the Spirit of God

speaking unutterable words of peace to the mourner, of healing after fiery trial, of anointing to the high calling of such as can suffer and be strong, of crowning for the conqueror who can rise above the lower plane of self-pity. To the east and west are wings rising out of the heart of a great seed husk, which, with the trumpet-shaped capitals of the small columns supporting the belfrey roof, are designed to suggest that ultimate word of triumph. "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power."

The carved cross, behind the wrought iron cross on the door of the chapel (Plate I.), is copied from a grave stone at Iona, in Argyleshire, and evidently a transcription from rude wicker work or "wattle," links this building with the first Christianity of Britain, when from rude churches built of wattle our forefathers' voices rose singing, "We praise Thee, oh God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord."[1] They very possibly used such a cross, woven in wattle, as symbol of their faith. The building, in its form, is also linked with the religious fervour of six or seven centuries later, when, in memory of the three sacred buildings at Jerusalem, usually called by the comprehensive name of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, they built in England eight round churches, four of which still exist. Of the buildings at Jerusalem, built by the Emperor Constantine, at the suggestion of

[1] The earliest existing transcript of the "Te Deum" is a Celtic manuscript, the Bangor Antiphonary, preserved in the Library at Milan.

his mother, to commemorate the Passion, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection, and consecrated to sacred uses in A.D. 335, it is interesting to notice that the round church, built over what was believed to be the site of the Holy Sepulchre, was called Anastasis, or Resurrection, for not the thought of death, but the thought of life, the promise of life eternal, was to be suggested by these sacred walls.

Behind the cross on the door there is a glimpse through a circle into light; circle within circle, with flames and wings—eternity, mystery, light, motion, spirituality, protection—ruling above the mystery of

darkness; the dragon below, smitten through by the cross. Into the iron hinges is wrought an old symbol, beautiful if translated by its accepted meaning in symbolism, the sail as the breath of life, with the T (tau) cross for the mast; the cross of faith and key of eternal life, another link in the great chain of aspiration forged only of these little concrete signs, but stretching far down the ages from human heart to human heart, for its comforting, strengthening, and uplifting God-ward.

THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO HAVE MODELLED ANY PART OF THE TERRA-COTTA WORK ON THE CHAPEL.

George Andrews
Mary Andrews
George Barrow
Albert Boxall
Victoria Booth
George Booth
Lilian Booth
Wright Booth
Charlotte Cobbett
Caroline Chitty
Phœbe Coxall
Harvey Cummins
Louis Deuchars
William Eyers
Frank Edwards
Eliza Ellice
Jeanie Ellice
John Etherington
Helen Fenner
Noah Fuligar
Loftus Fuligar
Mary Friend
Percy Goddard
Walter Goddard
Andrew K. Hichens
Joseph Head
Ethel Hopkinson
Geraldine Liddell
Dorothy Eleanor MacCallum
Ernest Martin
Walter Marshall
Willie Mercer
Fred Mercer
Harry Mills
Frank Mitchell
Benjamin Mitchell
William More-Molyneux
Elizabeth Nottridge
Benjamin Nash
Emma Pound
Percy Raggate
Edith Raggate
Thomas Steadman
Harry Steadman
Eva Self
Clarence Sex

Eleanor Sex
Ernest Sex
Wilfred Sex
Augustus Sex
Walter Sex
Tom Stovold
Jesse Stovold
William Strudwick
Alfred Smith
Harry Smith
Emma Thompson
George Thompson
Edward Tyler
Albert Tyler
Alice Thompson
Florence Thompson
John Thompson
Frederick Thompson
May Thompson
Gertrude Tugwell
Evelyn de Vesci
Mary Vesey
William Wren
Eva Wren
Tommy Wren
Mary S. Watts
May Warne

Of these the workers daily for nearly two years were :—Louis Deuchars, George Andrews, Thomas Steadman and Frank Mitchell, without whose intelligent interest and unfailing help the work could not have been done. Thomas Steadman carved the door, Clarence Sex wrought the iron hinges after a design contributed by Mr. George Redmayne.

Wm. H. Ward & Co., L'd., Printers, London.

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